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FURNISHING OF COUNTRY HOUSES.

BY RALPH A. CRAM.

NUMBER ONE—THE DINING ROOM.

MR. CRAM proposes to contribute a series of articles on the Furnishing and Decoration of Country Houses, to be continued in consecutive numbers.—(ED.)

I know of no one consideration which has so marked an effect on the final success of a dining room, as an appropriate, well selected situation. Undoubtedly the best position is one which will command both an east and a west light. By this arrangement we obtain the morning and evening sunlight, while at noon, in the heat of the day, no sunlight enters, and the room is consequently cool and shady, two almost indispensable features in a dining room. It is oftentimes impossible to have the dining room extend through the house, and when this is the case an east or west outlook is best, in fact any light is better than a south light. It is also well to have the light come from the ends, as a side light dazzles one half of the guests, and leaves the other side in an unpleasant shadow. In regard to artificial light, it seems to me that old fashioned wax tapers are the most pleasant. The sallow, sickly gas light is very bad in any room in the house, but in the dining room it is particularly ungrateful, as the light should here be mellow and subdued. Next to tapers, Duplex lamps are most desirable, as the light is very quiet and soft, particularly if the flame is inclosed in a globe of some soft, opalescent tint.

Next to a good situation, a successful scheme of color decoration is most important. A cool and restful feeling should always be sought for. Perhaps the very best colors are those which suggest nature, that is, green, blue green, blue, greenish brown, &c. White and yellow are much too dazzling to be used to any great extent except in the ceiling, where their presence is felt rather than seen.

One of the most prevalent errors in regard to the ornamentation of the dining room, is, that the decoration should be of natural form and suggestive of the purposes for which the room is used. With this idea in mind, modern decorators cover the walls with hunting scenes and fruit pieces. The decoration should, of course, be sufficiently suggestive to distinguish the dining room from the drawing room or library, but at the same time it should be unobtrusive. In many modern rooms the carpet is of an elaborate floriated pattern, the frieze is formed of panels of game, the drapery is embroidered with fruit, flowers and game. In short, wherever the bewildered guest turns, he is confronted by food, food everywhere, forcing him to remember that he is in a room for eating, and eating alone. And if the decoration is not sufficiently obtrusive, the guest is calmly informed that "Hunger is the best sauce," or admonished to "Eat at pleasure, drink by measure," and other impudent mottoes.

Ceiling decoration should be vague and undefined, and therefore any pattern of elaborate design or which contains brilliant colors should be strictly avoided. Floriated designs should, I think, never be used on ceilings, and rarely on the walls, and then only in conventionalized form. The dining room seems hardly the place for fine pictures, and therefore the wall presents an excellent chance for decoration, and we can here admit patterns of more elaborate design and richer coloring, than is advisable in rooms where pictures form the principal decoration of the walls.

The now common method of dividing the wall space into a dado, wall and frieze is probably as good as can be devised, a dado, or at least a chair rail, being indispensable in this room. If the room is naturally light a comfortable effect is obtained by finishing the room entirely in hard woods. When this is done, considerable bright metal work is necessary to enliven the naturally sombre tone of the woodwork. Hard wood finish, including floors, should be simply oiled, never polished, as the cold glittering is destructive of any feeling of repose. A polished floor, although quite appropriate in a palace, is entirely out of place in a dwelling, where everything should be cozy and home-like. If you cannot have a hard wood floor a pine floor painted several coats of some dark color is a very good substitute. A few soft rugs scattered here and there will be all the floor covering necessary.

Oak makes probably the most satisfactory floor, and by the way it is rather strange that this fine wood is so little used here in America. There is hardly a wood that grows here, that is capable of receiving so fine a finish. Treated with ammonia it at once receives that rich bronze green which is so much admired in old mediæval work. When fumigated it becomes of a warm brown; and ebonized it closely resembles the beautiful old English carved

oak, which is so eagerly sought after. Left in its original state it, after a few years, becomes a most beautiful red brown. In default of oak, ash is a very good substitute when stained, but it should never be left in its natural color, which is rather harsh and crude.

There should always be one principle feature in a room, and to this every thing else should be subordinate. The sideboard is obviously the principle object in a dining room, and on this piece of furniture should be lavished the richest carving and the finest metal work. It should, as it were, prompt the character of the decoration. Oak is an excellent wood for a sideboard, as it is unusually well adapted to set off to great advantage the treasures of Majolica, Sèvres, Benares brass, Venetian glass, &c., which should be confined to this piece of furniture alone, and not distributed recklessly over the walls, ceiling, and even the dado, as is the custom among the would be esthetes of the period.

What shall we have for a dining table? We would reply, a small solid table, or when there is company, two placed end to end. It is an easy question to answer, but it is next to impossible to make the people realize that their idol, the extension table, is really a most atrocious invention. The ordinary five-legged table is bad, but it seems almost pardonable beside that ingenious delusion, a pillar extension table. This crowning glory of the century presents to the uneducated eye simply a round table supported on an elaborate pillar of vast proportions. All very well, but the table is too small. Behold the transformation; a catch is turned, the massive pillar divides in two, and, by some telescopic arrangement the round table is pulled out, and by the addition of a few extra leaves we have a long table, the light ends of which are supported on ponderous half columns, while the weighty centre is kept up by a diminutive turned leg which is hidden somewhere inside the pedestal when the table is in its normal state.

In the plate illustrating this paper I have endeavored to embody some of the suggestions made above. The position of the room is that which should always be obtained, if possible, with light from the east and west. Not only do we obtain the best light by this arrangement, but also a perfect draught, ensuring complete ventilation, which is indispensable, for the odor of former meals is most effectual in destroying one's appetite. At the east end of the room is a broad luxurious divan, covered with soft cushions. At the opposite end is an archway opening into a large conservatory. The large door opens into the billiard room, and opposite it is another door to the main hall. Facing the sideboard is a recessed fireplace, and on the same side a little stairway runs up and meets the main flight. On the other side of the sideboard is a little niche filled with flowers, from the midst of which springs a tiny fountain, this little bower is lighted by a small window of delicate silvery glass. The other windows are filled with large panes of glass at the base, thus giving an uninterrupted view, while at the top arabesques of pale, opalescent glass are introduced. The woodwork is of oak stained a rich red brown; the floor is the same, and is covered here and there with Persian rugs of rich, soft colors. The hangings are a heavy Japanese stuff, dull blue green shot with silver, and with broad bands of greenish plush at the top and bottom, heavily embroidered with silver. The walls are covered with paper of an unobtrusive pattern, the general tone of which is silvery green, the background is dull silver, and over this are scattered delicate leaves of neutral green of all shades, so intermingled that one tone does not predominate. The frieze is plaster, ornamented with an elaborate arabesque in raised plaster; the background which is very rough, is silver, and the pattern is delicate sea green. The ceiling is peacock blue of varying depth, and over this is lightly brushed a filmy cobweb of silver. From the cross beams hang chandeliers of chased and burnished copper (purposely placed too high in the plate). The sideboard is a dark green oak richly carved, and ornamented with chased copper; the cove over the top is stamped leather, the background is silver, and over it is an elaborate arabesque of blues, greens, and pale yellows. In the back of the sideboard is a plaque of Benares brass. By the aid of the brilliant-hued faience on its shelves, this piece of furniture becomes the most prominent feature in the room, and strikes the key note of the composition. The rest of the furniture is dull green oak, upholstered with bronze-green leather embossed with silver. The fireplace alcove is filled with shimmering blue-green tiles.

As will be noticed, the decoration is principally blue-green and silver. This combination is not only wonderfully cool and refreshing in the daytime, but in the evening, when the candles are lighted, the effect is peculiarly delicate and charming.

DESTRUCTIVE DUST.

IT appears as though some unfortunate fate pursues the lover of the antique, and devises obstacles for the esthetically disposed.

One of those unrepentent sinners, who periodically come to the surface with a startling fact, has just discovered that dust is an element of destruction, and made up of particles as deadly in their power as giant powder or dynamite.

An announcement of this description is calculated to cause more genuine misery than at first appears. For some years past, the adoption and portrayal of the medieval has been encouraged, the cabinet work, the ornamentation, the pottery, the missals and the dust of that period have been assiduously collected, and adorn the drawing rooms of many of our richest homes. We are invited to sit upon a carved packing case of the Italian Renaissance, whose tracery is a refuge for antique dust, and we bear away with us a pattern of the design upon the loose end of our coat. The vases show classical outlines through their proper curtain of dirt, and Savonarola and Machiavelli, in plaster of Paris, look like exhausted travelers on the highway of the centuries. An aristocratic neglect hangs over the mirror, and Napoleonic dust settles on the escritoire. The etagère contains a choice assortment of historic dusts; one heap upon a bronze medal is an authenticated relic of the siege of Yorktown, kicked up by Washington's horse; another, a portion of the handful of earth grasped by William the Conqueror, when he stumbled and fell upon the shores of Britain; another lump attached itself to the cloak of Raleigh, when that gentleman threw this much quoted garment on the ground as a stepping place for the Virgin Queen; and another was sent by the late Chris. Columbus to his royal patrons, as a sample of what America could do on a March day.

In many collections, the ardor of gathering together curious specimens no doubt leads to a mild sort of deception, and in all probability there are numerous instances of sods being made up of "unrelated parts," and not at all "monolithic" in their character. This practice, of course, is to be deprecated, but may be excused in part, by the enthusiasm of the collectors. But the incentive for this is ended, no more can we find pleasure or even safety in the presence of these sacred particles; at any moment we are liable to be blown into eternity by a spontaneous dust-combustion, deadlier in its possibilities than the average table d'hôte.

Prof. Abel recently assured the Royal Institute that, "even perfectly non-combustible dusts possess the property of establishing the ignition of gas and air, and, furthermore, the action of non-combustible dusts appears to be due to physical peculiarities of the finely divided matter, and to be, perhaps, analogous to the contact-action, so well known to be possessed by platinum and some other bodies, whereby these bring about rapid oxidation of gas."

So far as we are concerned that settles it, we wish to sit in no room where such oxidation of gas is imminent; we wish to be untrammled in our friendly calls. The dust of Washington, and Napoleon and William must find a common resting-place in the scuttle, and the trophies of Raleigh and Columbus must be swept into eternal oblivion, otherwise destruction stares us in the face.

There is but one feeble ray of hope, and the Prof. exposes that, toward the conclusion of his lecture, when he says: "The employment of deliquescent substances (calcium chloride, sea-salt, &c.) in conjunction with watering has been advocated and tried, to some extent with success." This offers a breathing spell to the distressed antiquarian, and it is likely that comparative safety may be insured, by watering the precious dusts every morning with a solution of deliquescent substances.—(ED.)

NEW COLORS are getting as numerous and as bewildering, in their names at least, as the changes of a kaleidoscope. We hear of Dying Green, Virgin Gold, Roseate Snow, Comet, Bengal Fire, Flora's Triumph, Amorous Frog, Mandarin, &c., &c., and then we have Vieux Sèvres, Vieux Rose, Vieux Vert, Ficelle Shades, Modore, Télégraphe Blue, Chaudron, Grenat, Sfax, Réseda, Ardoise, Crevette, Alicante, Prune de Monsieur, and a host of others, which, considering the fact that many of them represent shades to which another name has been given by some other manufacturer, is not only a perfect nuisance to the buyer and the tradesman, but is simply ridiculous, and suggests the idea that it may soon be in order to found a "Color Exchange," in which to register every one of the five or six thousand shades and tints already named, as well as all new ones, and compel the system of a uniform nomenclature.